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ABSTRACT

To look at the relationship of personality type to differences in reading behavior among accomplished readers, a study analyzed a reading assignment for reading strategies used. Subjects, 27 college seniors majoring in secondary education, were given the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator, and were then given a reading journal activity, in which they read a difficult passage, recorded the steps they went through in gathering meaning from it, and summarized the passage. Assignments were analyzed for common strategies used by personality types as well as for strategies used by the students regardless of type. Findings suggest that personality types as determined by the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory do have some bearing on the way a person reads. While similar strategies were practiced by each group, the way these were adapted appeared related to personality type, suggesting a potentially important distinction between the ways various personality types approach the written word. (SR)

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Personality Types and Reading Styles

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Sharon Smith (1982, 1984, 1986) has produced a series of articles on the strategies employed by accomplished readers. While these strategies fit an overall pattern, there seem to be a considerable variety of approaches within the pattern. These studies led to the question of whether some underlying factor might explain the variety of responses to the reading task. One explanation for these differences may be found in the Myers-Briggs personality typology.

Smith (1982) documented five categories of strategies for deciphering text materials: nontext activities (assessment of prior knowledge, selection of study area, etc.), cursory text activities (skimming, deciding what is important, outlining, etc.), knowledge construction activities (learning term meanings, rereading, selecting items to focus on, etc.), comprehension monitoring techniques (deciding on mastery level, paraphrasing material, consulting outside sources, etc.), and consolidation and retention activities (posing questions for future consideration, getting a tutor, deciding to read related material, etc.). Her study concluded that effective readers decide on appropriate study plans, use the task and their own style to draw appropriate strategies from the five strategy categories, comfortably move from one strategy to another by the trial and error method, display consciousness of strategy

manipulation, decide on the appropriate level of mastery, and relate that level to the assignment and to their own needs. Howver, there was considerable variety within this framework in which particular strategies individuals chose to employ.

The present article deals with one possible underlying factor in explaining these differences in reading behavior among accomplished readers -- personality type. It is an attempt to relate personality type, as determined by the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Inventory (1975), to reading strategies used in acquiring meaning from an unfamiliar text passage.

The research of Myers and Briggs, built on the work of C. G. Jung, established 16 different personality types based on the polarities of introverting/extroverting, sensing/intuiting, thinking/feeling, and judging/perceiving. Other studies have linked these personality types to a wide variety of professional applications. Kiersey and Bates (1978), Wood (1985), and others, have related Myers/ Briggs typology to teaching and learning strategies. Indeed, it seems appropriate to look at the relationship of personality type to a specific learning behavior, that of reading.

Among the 16 types, Myers and Briggs determined four basic subtypes: SJ (sensing/judging), SP (sensing/perceiving), NF (intuiting/feeling), NT (intuiting/thinking). These represent core differentials in ways of looking at life. While there is real difference, for example, among the four NF types (ENFP,

ENFJ, INFP, INFJ), the core NF distinction forms the basic type differentiation. The same can be said for the other personality types. Let us look at each base type briefly.

The SJ (sensing/judging) personality in all its variations is characterized as security-seeking. SJ's like routines and patterns; they like step-by-step approaches to doing things. They plan carefully and value clarity. SJ's have a strong sense of responsibility. They are conscientious, tend to focus on procedures, and do not believe in "winging it." Precision in task-performance is their hallmark. These characteristics would suggest a strongly formed preference for orderly procedure in approaching the reading task and a tendency to cling to this method regardless of task.

The SP (sensing/perceiving) personality does not wish to prepare carefully for any task. SP's have a low tolerance for delay; they are usually active, not liking to spend time on tasks that require passive participation. Unless interested in something, they have a low tolerence for working on it. Indeed, traditional classroom activities have little value for SP types. They are more likely than the other types to drop out or opt out of education. This description would suggest that SP's would ignore a reading task unless they were strongly motivated to complete the assignment.

NF's (intuiting/feeling) are best characterized as global, diffuse thinkers. Human relationships hold a high value for this

type. They tend to be democratic in their approach to others and are extremely sensitive to criticism. They tend to be satisfied with general impressions; sometimes they will gloss over details, assuming they are masters of something when they are only generally aware of what it is. Their focus is on values. The NF orientation would suggest that this type would need motivation to take the reading task seriously. However, this type's emphasis on feelings might lead them to perform the reading assignment anyway to please their instructors. However, unless they found value in the reading themselves, they might do only enough to impress the instructor with their completion of the assignment.

The NT (intuiting/thinking) type tends to be highly intellectual. When NT's are interested in something, they may be filled with "why" questions. Their curiosity can be a lust. When uninterested, they may simply practice avoidance behavior. They are impatient with repetition. However, when interested, they want to master details. They tend to favor problem-solving approaches to learning, and will go to great lengths to track down material which will supply them with understanding. Authority means little to this type, unless it is earned. Thus, assignments may suffer if their value is not appreciated. Reading for this group would then depend on the value they placed on the knowledge to be gained from the reading assignment. If they perceived value, then NT's would probably do a thorough job in exploring the material; if not, NT's might do the least

thorough job of responding to the material.

The subjects of this research were 27 students taking Education X 401 (Teaching Reading in Content Areas) in spring of 1988. While these students had a variety of specializations, social sciences and math predominated. All were seniors majoring in secondary Education; most had only a student teaching course to take before graduation.

On the first day of class these students were given a variant of the Myers Briggs Personality Type Indicator. Results were interpreted for them, and they were asked to indicate personality type on future assignments.

The group was then given a reading journal activity, similar to those used by Smith (1982, 1984, 1985, 1986). A difficult passage explaining DNA, RNA, their relationship, and some diseases related to them, was given to the group (Appendix). Students were asked to record the steps that they went through in attempting to gather meaning from this passage, and then to summarize the passage as they understood it. When completed, the assignment was analyzed for common strategies used by the various personality types as well as for strategies used by students regardless of type. Strategies used by under 20% of the sample were disregarded as idiosyncratic, although it was noted whether these strategies were in harmony with personality type traits.

The size and nature of the group provided limitations for the study. Because all participants were future teachers, there

was a certain self-selection principle in effect. SJ's dominated the sample (14 to 9), which was to be expected since a large majority of secondary teachers are SJ's (Kiersey & Bates, 1979). The remainder were divided almost equally between NF's (5) and NT's (4); there were no SP's in the sample. For this reason, results can only taken as suggestive of the differences in reading strategies between personality types.

While all types of students had certain strategies in common, there were differences in the way each type reacted to the assignment. This was illustrated even in the way each group reported its work. The "SJ" group used few generalizations to discuss their methods of approaching the text. Their response length was moderate, between one and one and one-half pages. Their comments were filled with concrete words. They gave few generalizations, but dealt with the specific text they worked with. The NF group gave shorter responses, none more than a page in length. The issues raised were more general, and there was far less specific detail about their process of reading. The NT group provided both the shortest and the longest responses. Half of the group responded in half-page comments, mainly focusing on a determination that the passage in question bore no relevance to them, and therefore, that efforts to comprehend the material were minimal. The rest of the NT group provided significant detail about the processes they used. In so doing, they went into elaborate work ups of their process and even stated some of the

generalizations behind use of their process. Generally, these responses followed about what knowledge of their Myers-Briggs typology would have suggested for each group.

The technique most preferred by the SJ group was visualization. Ten respondents (71.4%) mentioned that drawing pictures and/or diagrams, either physically or mentally, was a major aid in understanding the material. Over half (57.1%) indicated that they re-read the material to confirm understanding. Half said that looked up words in dictionaries or other sources. Just under half (42.9%) skimmed material before reading it, noting key words, overall purpose of the passage, subject matter, and possible main ideas; a similar number took time to establish the relationship of this passage to material already known. They tried to recall where they might have run into similar material before or speculated on uses for the material. Other strategies listed by over 20% of the students were outlining, reading slowly, and use of context features to determine vocabulary meaning.

A large minority (35.7%) cited the determination of purpose as significant in adopting a strategy for reading the passage. Indeed, this determined whether they would read for details or just for a general idea of the material. However, regardless of purpose, the SJ group as a whole read the text very carefully.

The much smaller NF group cited skimming material to establish a context for reading and use of visualization as did

the SJ group. The NF group used mental pictures almost exclusively rather than actually drawing pictures. While this group was concerned with vocabulary, there was no indication of usage of texts or dictionaries to locate meaning. Rather the NF group relied on context, inferences, and recall of long past experiences (high school science courses mostly) for determination of word meaning. As a group, the NF's were content to read for main ideas, since they did not see any long term need for the material. Finally, half of this group said that they were put off by the style of the passage. They commented that if the writer had done a better job, they would have been more willing to give audience to the ideas contained in the passage. This stylistic concern was unique to the NF group.

The NT group used the visualization techniques favored by both other groups; they also skimmed before actually beginning the reading process. In common with the SJ's, the NT's read material slowly (if they determined that it was worth reading) and reread it for further understanding of what was read. However, the re-reading was selective. Material was highlighted while reading, and this material was then re-read. Establishing a purpose was very important. For those who determined that detailing and examining their reading process was important, the accounts of process ran from two to five pages. For those who determined that the purpose of the exercise was satisfied if they got from the passage what they thought was important, the

decision that this passage was meaningless for them led to superficial reading and short process descriptions.

Based on these differences, personality types as determined by the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory do have some bearing on the way a person reads. While similar strategies were practiced by each group, the way these were adapted appeared related to personality type. The SJ's, as a group, were more detail oriented and were more interested in completing the assignment thoroughly than were the other groups because the instructor asked them to do so. This was true even if they themselves saw little of value in the material. On the other hand, the NF's were less detailed; they used previous knowledge and avoided detail work as they seemed to see the assignment in terms of identifying means of dealing with a text of little interest. This was the only group to respond to the way things were said as well as to what was said. This follows the human relations and democratic tendencies of the NF's.

The NT's were in the middle. Some determined, as did the NF's, that the assignment was best treated for what the text was worth for them; these turned off on the text and were satisfied with superficial understanding. The others went into great detail with the why's behind the what's. These were showing the NT's attention to detail and desire for a thorough grasp of material. The former group was showing its propensity to cut off the meaningless.

Despite the small number of students involved, this study is suggestive of the difference in reading style among various personality types. It points to a potentially important distinction between the ways the various personality types approach the written word. Further, it indicates the need for study of larger groups, both of effective and of ineffective readers, to gain insight into specific styles of reading that can be used best by each group.

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